

LETTER to the Boobook Organisation RE: Political party responses to Boobook supporter questions by Gabrielle Dunlevy

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FED: Conservationists mark parties harshly

CANBERRA, Aug 19 AAP - Conservation groups have given the coalition a fail and Labor a scant pass mark, following an "underwhelming" election campaign for environmental issues.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and WWF on Thursday released their scorecards for the election campaign.

For both groups, the lack of commitment to a carbon tax by either major party was a huge void.

In its absence, the parties made a smattering of environmental pledges during the campaign.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett went to the Blue Mountains in NSW to release Labor's policy document in week four of the campaign.

Included was a commitment to marine parks, improve regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, and a review Australia's national environment law.

Labor earlier promised to add the Koongarra mining lease into Kakadu National Park, keeping uranium mining out of the area, and to establish "green corridors".

With \$10 million, Labor would work with 56 regional groups to grow the corridors as a carbon store and wildlife habitat.

It also repeated a 2007 election promise to introduce laws banning the import of illegal timber, a global problem worth \$65 billion a year.

Meanwhile, the coalition made waves by promising to suspend the marine parks process, a move that got the support of some anglers, but was condemned by scientists.

It also promised \$2.6 million for dugong and turtle protection, adding to the numbers of indigenous rangers on patrol for poachers, and helping to clean up discarded debris and fishing nets that snag the creatures.

ACF executive director Don Henry described the policies of both sides as "piecemeal".

From a possible 100, the group scored the Greens 89, Labor 44 and the coalition 20.

Putting the Greens way ahead was the commitment to a carbon price, but the coalition was marked down for its marine park stance.

"The coalition has gone exactly the wrong way on putting marine planning on hold because it leaves the vast majority of Australia's waters ... unprotected from oil drilling," Mr Henry told AAP.

"Labor has committed to keep moving forward with their marine planning work, but they haven't been specific in what the outcomes will look like."

WWF's director of conservation Dr Gilly Llewellyn agreed it had been a disappointing campaign.

The WWF scorecard ranked the parties by policy, on a green, amber or red measure.

The Greens had the most green lights, for committing to most of WWF's measures, while the coalition had the most red, for ruling them out.

For Dr Llewellyn, too, the coalition's marine park plan was a dangerous step backwards.

"The previous coalition government really set new global benchmarks with the re-zoning of the Great Barrier Reef marine park," she said.

"We were shocked to see the new policy from the coalition has gutted its past approach and walked away from its previous commitment to marine conservation."

Dr Llewellyn said recent polling for WWF showed 88 per cent of Australians were concerned political parties were lacking a vision or plan for the environment, and she urged them to prove the survey wrong.

"The Australian public are still crying out for political leaders to stand up and protect the environment," she said.

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